The Cleveland Museum of Art

Press Release

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MANET, MONET, WHISTLER: THREE MASTERPIECES TO GO ON VIEW AT THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART MAY 25

(Cleveland, OH) The Cleveland Museum of Art will exhibit three landmark works by 19th-century artists Edouard Manet, Claude Monet, and James McNeill Whistler beginning May 25. The exhibition, entitled **Manet, Monet, Whistler: Three Masterpieces**, is a rare opportunity to see these treasured paintings: Manet's *Street Singer* and Monet's *La Japonaise,* both from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and Whistler's *The White Girl (Symphony in White, No. 1)* from the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. The trio will be on view in gallery 235, adjacent to the museum's Impressionist and Post-Impressionist galleries, from May 25, 1997 through January 4, 1998. Admission is free.

The three paintings come to the Cleveland Museum of Art in exchange for several important Picasso paintings on loan to the exhibition **Picasso: The Early Years, 1892-1906**, which opened last week at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and then moves to the MFA, Boston in September. CMA director Robert P. Bergman commented, "We are very pleased to offer this unique opportunity for people to see these magnificent paintings. Each is a masterwork in its own right; seeing them together will be a wonderful experience."

The three paintings in **Manet, Monet, Whistler** are towering, full-length female subjects, ranging from 69 to 91 inches high. Each painting exemplifies the artist's innovations of style and approach. According to William H. Robinson, CMA's Assistant Curator of Paintings: "In their time, these pictures aroused considerable controversy because they deviated from accepted norms of painting. While the public expected works of art to tell morally uplifting stories, Manet, Monet, and Whistler were more concerned with exploring new painting techniques and methods of compositional arrangement. Their disregard for artistic traditions incited public scandal. Representing common, contemporary individuals (and models were regarded at that time as little more than prostitutes) in large formats without the covering figleaf of an allegorical or morally redeeming subject created quite a stir. Such formats were usually reserved for

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historical subjects and portraits of people of advanced social rank. An equally fascinating aspect of this exhibition," Robinson continued, "is that we now know a lot about the women who posed for the paintings. Each was the artist's favorite model and a significant source of inspiration at a pivotal moment in his career."

Edouard Manet's *Street Singer* (1862), exchanged from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, depicts everyday life in a bold, innovative style. The painting resulted from one of Manet's experiences while walking down a Paris street. He was startled by a woman who burst from the doors of a cafe, clutching a guitar. *Street Singer* pictures a woman with a guitar, eating a bunch of cherries (a detail he added). His model was Victorine Meurent, who later posed for Manet's famous paintings, *Luncheon on the Grass* and *Olympia.* Meurent's striking features deviated from the tendency for artists to depict conventionally beautiful women. In addition, Manet's technique lacked the glossy finish other paintings of the time possessed. To many, the absence of such gloss made the painting look unfinished. The main controversy of *Street Singer* arose from the absence of conventional modeling of the human figure and its lack of a redeeming moral narrative. Critics thought the work was crude and vulgar.

Monet's *La Japonaise* (1876), also on loan from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, portrays Monet's wife Camille posing as a flirtatious courtesan in a Japanese costume. The contrast between Camille's European features and her oriental accessories is accentuated by her blond wig. *La Japonaise* caused controversy during its time because of its sexual connotations and its unusual subject. As the title would suggest, the influence of Japanese art in the picture is paramount.

On loan from the National Gallery of Art, *The White Girl (Symphony in White, No. 1)* was painted by Whistler in 1862. It pictures a girl dressed in white standing on a wolfskin rug. She is Whistler's Irish mistress, Jo Hefferman, staring vacantly into space and holding a cut flower in her hand. Whistler's *The White Girl* displays his skill at arranging white against white on canvas, reflecting his modernist tendencies and foreshadowing later experiments in abstract art. Although most contemporary critics thought the work was crudely painted and the subject incomprehensible, one discerning critic was impressed by Whistler's creative use of light and color. He dubbed the painting *Symphony in White.* Whistler attached this title to his work because its "abstract" quality accurately reflected the avoidance of storytelling and illusionism that was one of his goals.

Manet, Monet, Whistler: Three Masterpieces will be on view during the museum's new regular hours: Tuesdays through Sundays 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and evenings on Wednesdays and Fridays until 9 p.m. Promotional support is provided by *Cleveland Magazine* and WCLV 95/5.

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